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Illegal Israeli actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Security Council
Seventy-second year

Identical letters dated 11 August 2017 from the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council

We are compelled to draw your attention to the ongoing rise in tensions and violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, as Israel, the occupying Power, continues its military aggressions and human rights violations against the Palestinian people. Israeli settlement activities, the blockade and bombardment of the Gaza Strip, home demolitions and evictions, military raids and inflammatory provocations are exacerbating conditions on the ground and confirming Israel's rejection of the peace that the State of Palestine remains committed to achieving, along with the rest of the international community.

In flagrant defiance of international law, including Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), and consistent demands to cease its illegal, destructive settlement campaign in the Occupied State of Palestine, including East Jerusalem, the occupying Power continues to provoke and incite with repeated declarations regarding further plans to colonize the Palestinian land. Just last week, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu laid the cornerstone for a new settlement compound with more than 1,000 settlement units in the illegal "Beitar Illit" settlement, located south of Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank. In a speech at the ceremony marking the start of construction, Netanyahu hailed his Government's continuous work on illegal settlements and on serving the settler population, boasting that "no other Government has worked for settlements like my Government".

It should be recalled that "Beitar Illit" is the second largest illegal Israeli settlement in the occupied West Bank. It was built in 1990 as part of the so-called "Gush Etzion" settlement bloc south of the occupied West Bank, which has nearly 50,000 illegal settlers. Here, it must be highlighted, intimidation, violence and constant harassment by extremist Israeli settlers, with the collusion and protection of the occupying forces against the Palestinian people and their properties, are also inflaming tensions and instability. Such unlawful actions are the cause of widespread suffering, fear and trauma among the civilian population. We reiterate our demand for the perpetrators to be held accountable for their crimes.

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Moreover, the occupying Power continues to impose measures of collective punishment against the entire Palestinian population living under its ruthless military occupation. In the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, measures of collective punishment, such as home demolitions, curfews, checkpoints and closures, not only continue but are escalating, deliberately, systematically and with grave impact.

Here, we wish to focus your attention on the pending evictions in Sheikh Jarrah, which is located to the north of the Old City of Jerusalem and is home to some 3,000 Palestinians. Sheikh Jarrah is a Palestinian neighbourhood that includes such landmarks as Orient House (the Palestine Liberation Organization headquarters in Jerusalem, forcibly closed by the Israeli occupying authorities since 2003), the Palestinian National Theatre and the headquarters of many diplomatic missions. The Palestinian presence in this area of the City, as throughout the entirety of Occupied East Jerusalem, is under serious threat as a result of the aggressive and unlawful policies and actions of Israel, the occupying Power.

Since 1967, Israeli policies in Occupied East Jerusalem have extended from two central strategies. The first is to create a Jewish majority in the city through the establishment of "Jewish-only" settlements. The second pursues the same goal by measures aimed at reducing the Palestinian population, using policies that either forcefully evict Palestinian families from Jerusalem or impede the growth and development of the community. This includes a policy of spatial segregation, that is, reducing the visibility, if not the demographic ratio, of Palestinians in their home city.

One of the main elements of the first strategy is the insertion of Israeli settler "outposts" at key strategic points within Palestinian neighbourhoods. Successive Israeli Governments have supported settler organizations in their intensive efforts to seize Palestinian land, homes and other properties in the neighbourhood, using methods such as the transfer to settler groups of ownership of land or property confiscated by the Israeli occupying authorities under the "Absentee Property Law" and the transfer of ownership of land classified as public or State land owing to its ecological, historical or religious importance.

In order to attain the goal of creating illegal settlements, the Israeli occupying authorities use various pretexts to seize properties and forcibly evict families. This is usually done with the complicity and help of obliging Israeli courts. This is the situation now facing the Shamasne family residing in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood, who recently received an eviction order from the so-called "Execution Office of Israel's Enforcement and Collection Authority". The order stated that the family must vacate its home by 9 August 2017 or be forcibly evicted. Mohammed Kiswani, a community leader, explained that more 70 Palestinian families are being threatened with evacuation from the Sheikh Jarrah area.

In that regard, Mohammed Shamasne, 45 years of age, has stated that he "will not evacuate voluntarily". He has resided in his home in Occupied East Jerusalem his whole life, as his parents first moved into the house in 1964 and still live there, along with his wife and four children. His mother, Fathyeh, 75 years of age, added that she has "spent decades in this house; I raised my kids here and am raising my grandsons now — how could they think they can remove me from my house?" We call for the international community, including the United Nations, to mobilize to stop this latest eviction of yet another Palestinian family by the occupying Power and to spare them the further physical, mental and emotional trauma of being illegally and forcefully dispossessed, forced from their home and displaced by this cruel military occupation.

At the same time, Israel, the occupying Power, is continuing its arrest and detention raids throughout the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Palestinian civilians are being detained daily, with young men and boys severely targeted by the occupying forces, who routinely assault, humiliate and severely abuse, including torture, those civilians arbitrarily arrested or detained. In fact, according to a joint report by the Palestinian Prisoners' Society, the Mezan Center for Human Rights, the Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association and the Palestinian Committee of Prisoners' Affairs, the Israeli occupying forces detained 880 Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the besieged Gaza Strip in the month of July alone. The report states that among the detainees were 144 children and 18 women and that the majority of the detentions took place in East Jerusalem and surrounding neighbourhoods, with a total of 425 detentions. We call for an end to this illegal practice and for Israel to release the nearly 7,000 Palestinian prisoners that it holds captive in its prisons and detention centres, in gross contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Moreover, in the Gaza Strip, the occupying Power is continuing its policies and measures of collective punishment against the entire Palestinian civilian population. Its illegal, immoral decade-long blockade continues to gravely affect the 2 million civilians there, who are suffering a dire socioeconomic and humanitarian crisis deliberately caused by the occupation. This past week, Israel also continued its aggression in the Gaza Strip, including a launch of air strikes in three different areas, injuring at least four Palestinians, including one who has been hospitalized with a fractured skull. In addition, the occupying Power is continuing to attack Palestinian fishermen sailing in Gaza's waters.

Moreover, according to recent news reports, Israel has announced that it is currently working on plans to build a so-called barrier around the Gaza Strip. This provocative and illegal scheme must be condemned and stopped immediately, for it surely constitutes a flagrant violation of international and international humanitarian law and places the Palestinian civilian population and the whole of Gaza, which has already been deemed by the United Nations as "unliveable" by the year 2020, in an even more precarious state.

The destructive impact of the above-mentioned Israeli violations is immense. This cannot be overemphasized in a situation marked by rising tensions, deteriorating socioeconomic and humanitarian conditions, and deepening anger and frustration among the Palestinian people living under this half-century-old occupation. We call yet again upon the international community, including the Security Council, to demand an end to all of the illegal Israeli policies and practices in the Occupied State of Palestine, including in East Jerusalem. Israel must be held fully accountable, in accordance with international law and the principles of justice, for all of its violations and its continuing obstruction of peace.

This is a matter of urgency. It can no longer suffice to condemn or simply be appalled by Israel's illegal actions; serious international action, including practical measures, is necessary to bring an end to Israel's occupation. The Security Council must immediately act to uphold the duties of the Charter of the United Nations and implement its own resolutions, including its most recent, resolution 2334 (2016). This is the first and most vital step towards compelling Israel to end its aggression and crimes so that the Palestinian people can finally live in freedom and dignity in their own independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The present letter is in follow-up to our previous 617 letters regarding the ongoing crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, which constitutes the territory of the State of Palestine. These letters, dated from 29 September 2000 (A/55/432-S/2000/921) to 28 July 2017 (A/ES-10/759-S/2017/651),

constitute a basic record of the crimes being committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people since September 2000. For all of these war crimes, acts of State terrorism and systematic human rights violations being committed against the Palestinian people, Israel, the occupying Power, must be held accountable and the perpetrators brought to justice.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter distributed as a document of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 5, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Riyad **Mansour**
Ambassador, Permanent Observer
of the State of Palestine to the United Nations